

Writing Refugee in the Era of Displacement: Reflections on Poetry Kamal Sbiri

Introduction

The beginning of the twenty-first century will be remembered by mass refugees and forced migrants. Even though the category of refugee writing has been politically defined, it has been overlooked in the present post-colonial debate.¹ One of the main factors supporting this exclusion in literary criticism can be understood by Said's statement that refugees have no definite identity and, using his words, are 'without a tellable history'.² In this paper, I will show that the term displacement can function to consider refugees' writing as a device for articulating their subjectivity. An emphasis on estrangement in refugee writing outside the stream of external representation is needed, which will help deconstruct the discourse that sees refugees as either victims or rootless identities. The idea stemming from this belief urges us to deterritorialise the corpus within which refugees are narrated so as to include them in the post-colonial debate. The main issues this article seeks to address are: 1) the effects of dislocation and nostalgia on refugee writing, and 2) the ways liminality becomes a permanent feature in reconstructing refugee identity. These issues will be addressed by applying Deleuze and Guattari's notion of deterritorialisation as a literary approach to the selected poems by refugees that problematise the notions of home and belonging.

The sources discussed in this paper have been mainly collected from the Exiled Writers' Ink! website with emphasis placed on selected poems by refugees. The criteria for selecting the poems are based mainly on the effect of place on the construction of refugee identity and the re-constitution of their writing. In other words, the effects of the presence of the notion of homeland on refugee identity is paramount in the selected poems, especially in noting that the refugee identity is in a state of *becoming*. It is in constant flux and changing in a dialogic relationship with the points of their transit/ion. As a result, home and belonging become problematic constructs in refugee poetry and therefore constitute important features in the construction of refugee identities. It is my intention in this paper to show that through literary criticism, such studies as this will also explore the forms of identity construction and will reveal the complexities surrounding the (re-)construction of the notion of 'home' and identity in an era of transculturation.

(Dis-)placing Refugees

Throughout the colonial period, the notion of travel tracks a movement from Europe to Africa and Asia. The movement was claimed to be free from international

¹ Some works have tried to contribute to such a debate, one of which is Jopi Nyman's *Home, Identity, and Mobility in Contemporary Diasporic Fiction* (Amsterdam & NY: Rodopi, 2009). Nyman devotes a full chapter to the question of identity qua refugee writings. This has also been modified in his article 'Refugee(s) Writing', where he analyzes refugee writing vis-à-vis dislocation. (Jopi Nyman, 'Refugee(s) Writing: Displacement in Contemporary Narratives of Forced Migration', *Africa Writing Europe: Opposition, Juxtaposition, Entanglement*, eds. Maria Olausson and Christina Angelfors (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009) 245-68.)

² Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2003) 176.

boundaries and the crossing of frontiers took place without a 'passport'. Since then, the colonial enterprise has been achieved and the process of de-colonisation reached its peak at the end of the twentieth century. Subsequently, geographical boundaries now mark a territorial distinction between cultures, languages, and nations opening the space for endless, violent fights over hunger, health, and education in Africa, Eastern Europe, and Asia. Such conditions forced certain people to migrate, and as a consequence, the passport was introduced in the early twentieth century and became significant along with new legal restrictions. What remains for refugees are movements of escape, organised or clandestine, out of struggle to face new structures of resistance over recognition and to search for identity in the new home. Moreover, refugee poetry would be considered a new category that debates the notion of forced migration in the era of globalisation. It allows the dynamics of movement and culture to intertwine in re-constructing refugee identity in our world today.

In the meantime it might be problematic to understand these movements and processes without paying attention to the enormity of the term globalisation. In Roland Robertson's words, globalisation 'refers to the compression of the world',³ whereas for Martin Albrow it 'means that societies now cannot be as systems in an environment of other systems, but as sub-systems of the larger inclusive world society'.⁴ Consequently, the term globalisation seem to suggest that when the world is encoded as a single global village, displacement has been incorporated in the stories and histories of orphaned people, marginalised minorities, and disconcerted species.

Yet the prolific discussions of the term globalisation provide a wide range of concepts and phrases, mostly concise, to describe the current state of this millennium. Those succinct descriptions, however, alert us to the fact that the term itself is contested as far as travel and displacement are concerned. Travel without boundaries is one aspect of these concepts that was enacted before, and 'banned' today. In this context, war, displacement, disengagement, and refugees become characteristic of the twenty-first century. Caren Kaplan reminds us that the 'prevalence of metaphors of travel and displacement [...] suggests that the modern era is fascinated by the experience of distance and estrangement'.⁵

Displacement can be approached from various perspectives, historical, political, or cultural. Many have come to experience travel, but the difference lies in the rationale behind such travel. History has marked the continuous movement of humans. Yet pertinent to displacement, glorifying exile over other aspects of displacements, such as refugees, remains critical in such a context. Many critics make exile worthless to refugees. In Eva Hoffman's article, 'The New Nomad', for instance, refugees are relegated to a position that is below all other movements of displacement.⁶ To glorify exile over refugees or diaspora over exile is to construct a hyperreality that connotes the perspective of the binary opposition – exile/refugee or diaspora/exile. Perhaps this glorification pertains to the myth of living in a story that is not one's own, but diaspora has helped to decentre the bipolar model of dislocation.

³ Ronald Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: SAGE, 1992) 8.

⁴ Martin Albrow, *The Global Age: State and Society beyond Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996) 11.

⁵ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourse of Displacement* (Durham & London: Duke UP, 1996) 1.

⁶ Eva Hoffman, 'The New Nomad', *Letters of Transit: Reflections on Exile, Identity, Language, and Loss* ed. Andre Aciman (NY: The New Press, 1998) 40.

Hybridised borders and hyphenated identities assume a painstaking projection of dislocation in its contemporary global diasporic features.

The term refugee becomes the construct that has emerged out of globalisation, yet the subsequent emergence of concepts such as diaspora and exile in literary and cultural studies has retained the word 'refugee' as a mere political phenomenon. The word 'refugee' is a political construct because a number of factors are connected to enforce displacement in a massive way.⁷ Refugees 'are produced by political upheavals, persecution, war, and economic debacles *engendering* considerable losses ... and traumas.'⁸ This idea does not seem worthy of exultation in the twenty-first century, simply, because 'Said's ideas are based on the modernist cult of the exilic writers ... whose creative process is triggered by the "solitude" which allows him to see more clearly.'⁹

In addition, identity reconstruction is critical to refugees. Maria Olaussen points out that the act of seeking refuge in the nation-states of Europe presumes that the refugee urgently needs to change his/her name¹⁰ as a way to avoid some legal restrictions that may lead to her/his deportation.¹¹ Furthermore, the change of names cannot be viewed as a mere solitary act, but a contingent one that springs from the intangible chain of a hide-and-seek game with the self and agency in the host country. In effect, this constitutes a problem regarding the multiple identities that a refugee may inhabit for her/himself, which risks, I think, the possibility for self-representation: to inhabit a fake name may distort the image that a refugee seeks to represent as the real image of refugees. Simon Lewis, in this regard, asks: 'under such circumstances, when individual identity ... appears problematic ... what kind of imagined communities' does the refugee affiliate her/himself with?'¹²

Camino and Krulfeld, in the 'Introduction' to *Reconstructing Lives, Recapturing Meaning*, point out that 'in the process of losing country, community, family, status, property, culture, and even a sense of personal identity, replacement for these losses must be created.'¹³ The changing circumstances at home and in 'exile' may justify, accordingly, the process of fabricating stories to secure the refugee's future. Nevertheless, the question of authenticity is crucial to the construction of refugee identity. Such a double identity is the result of being 'undocumented'. Said, thus, rightly concludes that there are those 'awful forlorn waste of "undocumented" people suddenly lost, without a tellable history'.¹⁴ Of course not all refugees are necessarily undocumented, yet disparity is apparent between those forced migrants who seek refuge in Africa and the Arab World, and refugees who succeed in entering

⁷ Nyman 'Refugee(s)' 247; emphasis added.

⁸ Linda Camino and Ruth M. Krulfeld, 'Introduction', *Reconstructing Lives, Recapturing Meaning: Refugee Identity, Gender, and Culture Change* (Basel: Gordon & Breach Publishers, 1994) ix; emphasis added.

⁹ Nyman 'Refugee(s)' 248.

¹⁰ Maria Olaussen, 'Refusing to Speak as a Victim: Agency and the *arrivant* in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Novel by the Sea*', *Africa Writing Europe: Opposition, Juxtaposition, Entanglement*, ed. Maria Olaussen and Christina Angelfors (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009) 219-21.

¹¹ Camino and Krulfeld x.

¹² Simon Lewis, 'Impossible Domestic Situations: Questions of Identities and Nationalism in the Novels of Abdulrazak Gurnah and M. G. Vassanji', *Thamyris* 6.2 (1999) 217-8.

¹³ Camino and Krulfeld x.

¹⁴ Said 176.

the nation-states of Europe (one for instance could compare the Palestinians in Jordan and Iraq with those in Finland and Norway): the difference is in that the former are lost suddenly because they escape from war and the instability at home only to meet with dispersion on border camps. In short, refugees who succeed at entering the nation-states of Europe seem to have a better chance to retell their stories to the world, whereas those who fail in their journey to Europe also fail to make their voices heard. It can be argued that these conditions partly explain the publication of refugee poetry and writing by refugees who live in the Euro-America zone only in Britain.¹⁵ As a result, both Said and Olausen propose a new paradigm of representation that is needed by refugees. Whether mediated or articulated through literature, the refugee is far from representing her/himself; rather, they *are represented*. The obvious pattern of refugees can be glimpsed from media representations that 'turn the refugee problem into a spectacle where migrants attempt to reach Europe in overloaded boats, often failing in the process'.¹⁶ The asylum-seeker is depicted in media discourse in the same way as the colonised were represented by the colonisers: as 'uneducated, vulgar parasite ... barbarian others'.¹⁷ Moreover, this racialised discourse is conveyed in the name of national security.

One way to deterritorialise these *territorial* couplings is to follow Deleuze and Guattari's notion of deterritorialisation. In order for the refugee's voice to be heard s/he needs to deterritorialise the position where s/he is situated. Accordingly, deterritorialisation assumes that a refugee may be able to leave the territory of external representation (deterritorialisation) and immediately establish his/her own space (reterritorialisation). In this regard, the process of deterritorialisation affirms Deleuze and Guattari's model of changing locations by defining the term as 'the movement by which one leaves a territory'.¹⁸ In effect, both processes function dialogically: the moment deterritorialisation is achieved, it is followed by reterritorialisation. Deterritorialisation in the present analysis is viewed as a process of dislocation.

For a refugee, the process of deterritorialisation becomes the location that marks the territory of her/his identity, i.e. the space of refugee identity reconstruction. Most often, when a refugee arrives in the nation-state of Europe, she/he has already crossed and traversed a number of hotlines and points of struggle, suggesting that she/he is already dislocated. Camino and Krulfeld point out that 'this process usually necessitates unplanned and rapid adjustment to ... resettlement in places within alien cultures'.¹⁹ Therefore, to endure the confusion of the journey from home and 'temporary sanctuaries', a refugee must be prepared to cope with the new situation of location, dislocation, and relocation.²⁰ This dynamic also suggests that the act of moving from a static point to an undetermined one juxtaposes the formation of the

¹⁵ cf. Eric Ngalle Charles, Tom Cheesman, and Sylvie Hoffman, *Between a Mountain and a Sea: Refugees Writing in Wales* (Swansea: Hafan Books, 2003).

¹⁶ Nyman Refugee(s) 245.

¹⁷ Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo, 'Asylum Stories: Constructing Zimbabwean Identities in the Diaspora', *Neo-colonial Mentalities in Contemporary Europe? Language and Discourse in the Constitution of Identities*, eds. Guido Rings and Anne Iff (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008) 74-5.

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum, 2004) 559.

¹⁹ Camino and Krulfeld x.

²⁰ Camino and Krulfeld x.

refugee's ethnic identity with that of the new culture. This process, called 'liminality', locates the refugee in a 'betwixt, and between all fixed points'.²¹ Such a position implies that a refugee's identity can be constructed anew as a form of rapid innovative structures that set aside, at least in part, those forms of homeland traditions and cultures that are carried by refugees. The refugee, throughout the process of dislocation, faces certain impossibilities that wax and wane according to the 'new configurations of ethnic identities'.²² It should be noted that the process of changing locations, by force or by choice, inspires a transcultural understanding that enables the refugee to speak the unspeakable as a liminal hybrid subject.

Subsequently, the elasticity of the term liminality poses certain questions as to whether a refugee can be considered a hybrid. The term hybridity recalls Homi Bhabha's notion of the middle passage and of in-betweenness. According to Bhabha, 'hybridity is the perplexity of the living ... it is an instance of iteration, in minority discourse' that leaves meanings of culture open to scrutiny.²³ However, in 'Debating Hybridity', Shailja Sharma argues that, although hybridity may function as a goal, sometimes it becomes a burden to be avoided because 'it degenerates into a simplistic, ahistorical "fusion" aesthetic'.²⁴ The 'fusion aesthetic' may imply the economy of resisting the act of self-representation and xenophobic behaviour that surround minorities in general and refugees in particular. Hybridity, according to Werbner, deconstructs identity²⁵ and thereby offers the basis for negotiating the refugee's identity in, for example, the nation-states of Europe. The notion of hybridity is significant to the construction of refugee writing. It construes the psychological dimension of refugee writing and points to the gaps that displacement leaves on the psyche of the refugee. Hybridity can also function to explain the occurrence of such gaps left by the process of deterritorialisation on the constructed identity of refugees.

Though these gaps question the notion of belonging for refugees, the right to belong becomes equal to the construction of identity. The escape a refugee makes remains a counterpoint for a refugee identity in escaping from the trauma of the past and longing for a transcultural belonging in the present. Yet when a refugee makes the first escape from war, she/he seeks to challenge and traverse international barriers and boundaries in order to justify her/his existence in the host culture. The need for protection that ends with a struggle for identity construction does not mean to encourage or romanticise the mass refugee taking place in the world today. Quite the opposite, the aim is to establish a background from which one can begin analysing and reading 'new literatures' in English such as refugee poetry. I wish to stress the notion of newness because post-colonial literature was perceived as 'new' before it was canonised. Accordingly, I aim to argue, the refugee is underrepresented in contemporary post-colonial studies. She/he is a subject, colonised at home, chaotic in her/his journey, stigmatised in the new home, and split: these are the implications that

²¹ Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (London: Cornell UP, 1974) 232.

²² A. Linda Camino, 'Refugee Adolescent and Their Changing Identities', *Reconstructing Lives*, 50.

²³ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 314.

²⁴ Shailja Sharma, 'Debating Hybridity', *Neo-colonial Mentalities*, 35.

²⁵ Pnina Werbner, 'Introduction: the Dialects of Hybridity', *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe: Racism, Identity and Community*, eds. Modood Tariq and Werbner Pnina (London: Zed Books, 1997) 15.

encourage one to begin debating refugees' writing and specifically the poetry of refugees.

Refusing to speak as a victim may promote the process of deterritorialisation that would enable refugees to crack the mainstream discourse in which they are viewed as minorities. Efforts have already been made in this respect, though the act of re-writing refugee identity remains inadequate. In the following section I will discuss some poems produced by refugees from the Arab world, Asia and Africa. These readings aim at introducing refugee writing into the post-colonial debate. They also seek to analyse the effects of concepts such as displacement, nostalgia and liminality on the construction of refugee identity and how they seek to deterritorialise the present status in contemporary post-colonial discourse.

Liminality, nostalgia, and homelessness in refugee poetry

In the previous section I sought to demonstrate how the notion of deterritorialisation as a literary approach helps to dismantle the discourse that marginalises refugees' writing. I also explained how dislocation positions the refugee identity in a liminal space of betwixity. However, the cultural tension and the feeling of exile that a refugee experiences remain sites of confusion in the poems of refugees, which further problematises the notions of home and belonging. In this section I will focus on concepts of liminality, nostalgia, and homelessness as aspects of this problematisation. I will show how the process of deterritorialisation forces the refugee to be positioned between two realities: Whereas being home becomes a source of inspiration, being away turns out to be a no more than the possibility of having a voice.

In her poem 'Here and There' Sozan Mohammed (from Kurdistan) describes the sense of alienation in the 'new' home (England) and her aspirations for the journey back to her native country:

My steps are dragging me along the road
My remote imagination demanding an inspiration
They are sailing through the ocean
Walking in a dark field
And flying through the space
Just to find an inspiration
I used to find inspiration by the sun ... the moon
... the sea and the sky
Even the walls of my bedroom were inspiring.²⁶

The first lines of this poem depict the forceful drive that pushes the speaker toward her homeland. The word 'drag' may imply the forced movement with which the poet crosses the ocean and meets with her past. It also reminds us of the forced migration the poet first made from home to England. Thus the word 'drag' implies two parallel movements: from and to. The ensuing lines reveal the purpose behind the need for a second journey: to seek an environment for inspiration. The speaker in the poem seems to experience a process of silence characterised by the sequence of the sound

²⁶ Sozan Mohammed, 'Here and There', *Exiled Writers Ink: Voices in a Strange Land*. 1 Sept. 2009
<http://www.exiledwriters.co.uk/writers.shtml#Mohamed>

's' (steps, sailing, inspiration, sea, sky, splashing, etc.). The failure to at least imagine the homeland can be attributed to this silence. As a result, it can be said that the speaker in the poem already makes her choice to stay in the host land but against her will, because only home gives her the inspiration to write. Britain is described as a ruthless place (she equates the word 'ocean' with 'dark field') in comparison to the sunny Iraq, and the 'beautiful' rivers of Dijla and Furat. In the adverb 'even' there seems to be a sense of alienation: in spite of having been forced out of the country, the imagined homeland remains the desired place. By the end of the poem, the speaker confesses that

I am an unfinished portrait
left shuttered in the middle of nowhere
Or perhaps
I am a lost individual
Left divided between here and there.²⁷

The speaker assumes inspirations only in her home country; however, she is not sure whether it is time to go back. This state of indecisiveness is a result of dislocation where the construction of identity has been scattered among different points. According to Nyman, this is one aspect of liminality described by Victor Turner, which is 'woven into the narratives of forced migration through the use of languages and images of confusion, where the sense of exile and exhaustion creates an uncanny sense of inbetweenness'.²⁸ 'Here and There', in this regard, expresses the feeling of being neither here nor there but, as Turner puts it, 'in betwixt', where the feeling of going back is not a desirable one, but one driven by force. For Bhabha, this inbetwixtness is a salient feature to nation-building, and should not be conceived of only in a negative connotation. Bhabha points out that

It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated ... Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively.²⁹

The aspect of cultural liminality represented in this poem can thus point to the dynamic process of transculturation belonging in the host country. Instead of being neither here nor there, liminality assumes that identity is constructed vis-à-vis nation. Furthermore, to be a 'lost individual' may also suggest that the speaker experiences another process of uncanniness in which the familiar becomes strange. The desire to be at home while the speaker is away may explain the failure of deterritorialisation. Even though the speaker has left her territory she seems unable to establish one of her own. Simply, because the place she wants to create is not a new one as reterritorialisation might suggest, but a way to retain her old territory. This

²⁷ Mohammed.

²⁸ Nyman Refugee(s) 251.

²⁹ Bhabha 2.

uncanniness is best described when the speaker says that she is 'left divided between here and there'.

It can be argued that the identity formation of refugees remains visible in the dynamic of dislocations. This dialogic is apparent in Nahida Izzat's (born in Jerusalem) poem 'Will I Ever Grow Up Again?' The speaker declares that during her thirty-seven years in exile, she fails to recall any memories except those connected to her childhood in her country of origin:

My internal clock is shattered into pieces
The 37 years of forced exile
Have no record in my book of memories
blank sheets; Page after page
...
A sad story with an unwritten scripts.³⁰

Her stay in the host country that interrogates her identity formation turns her life into disenchantment. The speaker's relief is contemplated through the time before she was exiled.

I was seven
I am seven
And I will stay seven
Until the day of my return.³¹

In these lines, the speaker's aim is to make the journey back home, which she believes can make her life start anew. The speaker refuses to grow old until she can return home; her life will start, figuratively, at the age of seven, the time when she last saw her home. The act of forgetting here (no records, lost titles, blank sheets, unseen pictures) is juxtaposed with the act of remembering. In other words, she can only remember her past through forgetting her present. The speaker's moment of consciousness lies in the moment she seeks to forget her present through remembering the past. As Paul Ricoeur writes:

When remembering, the emphasis is placed on the return to awakened consciousness of an event recognized as having occurred before the moment when consciousness declares having experienced, perceived, learned it. The temporal mark of the before, thus constitutes the distinctive feature of remembering.³²

The 'before' moment for the speaker is the age of seven and the present remains a void that 'blank sheets' and fragments of 'unseen picture' represent. Yet memory does not function as the moderator between the home culture and the culture of exile.

³⁰ Nahida Izzat, 'Will I ever Grow Old?', *Exiled Writers Ink: Voices in a Strange Land*. 1 Sept. 2009
<http://www.exiledwriters.co.uk/writers.shtml#Izzat>

³¹ Izzat.

³² Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Remembering*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: U Chicago P, 2004) 58.

The invocation of memory by the speaker may suggest the years of silence represented by the refrain 'life on hold'. The use of contradicted forms in this poem implies that the speaker not only longs for nostalgia to imagine her home country, but that nostalgia (unseen/pictures; images/no colour; mysterious characters/no faces) also carries with it the notion of loneliness and lack of freedom, and homelessness. A refugee in diaspora lives in two places at once, and aspires to compensate for the loss of homeland with an 'imagined community'. To be 'without a tellable history' is replaced by nostalgia.

This sentiment of 'longing-for' is repeatedly articulated in narratives by refugees, as in the case in the poem 'In the Name of Kabul' by Berang Kohdomani (an Afghani refugee):

My presence is here but
 My heart is in the alley-ways of Kabul
 My tongue utters its name
 My lips sing a song of Kabul.³³

The dream of returning is often met with drastic problems. Deterritorialisation can hardly be achieved because the emphasis is placed on the old territory (home). Identity in this poem is represented as being split and set in between: not here and not yet there. The speaker seems to be physically here (in exile) but emotionally there (home country) and to make a decision whether to go back home is not an easy process as it would turn into 'an adventure without conclusion'. The ensuing lines of the poem describe the silent cry of the country where 'the sick children and orphans of Kabul' are in need of urgent 'release from destruction and annihilation'. The majority of the poem is reminiscent of an elegy (or prayer, lamentation). The focus seems to be the desperate present of Kabul.

In contrast to the state of indecisiveness, Hilton Mendelsohn inquires in 'Another African Catastrophe' why he cannot now hear those voices and see those men and women who have fought against Apartheid to free the country from the new colonial 'native'?

Another African Catastrophe
 Born out of apathy
 Black men and women
 Will always talk
 And talk
 Bring up Apartheid
 And slave boats,
 And exploitation
 By white folks
 But what about when it is our own?
 ...
 when we fight to be free

³³ Berang Kohdomani, 'In the Name of Kabul', *Exiled Writers Ink: Voices in a Strange Land*. 1 Sept. 2009, <http://www.exiledwriters.co.uk/writers.shtml#Kohdomani>

From the brutality
Of African tyranny
I don't see you

...
I just don't know.³⁴

The speaker of the poem seeks to understand the reason behind the silencing of those voices that called for an end to colonialism. The main point that the poem addresses rests in the very cause behind the existence of mass refugees in the world today: The chaotic struggles over hunger, worsened by ethnic cleansing and religious conflicts, have forced people to migrate in huge groups to the neighbouring countries. It is noteworthy that the condition of refugee does not designate merely those people whom Said calls 'forlorn', but also individuals who seek to point to the power that forced their exile and which delays their return home.

This issue is strikingly presented in the poem 'Promised Prophecy' by Eric Charles (from Cameroon).³⁵ The first stanza introduces the scene where the speaker, an old man, meets with a sage on the peak of a mountain. This scenery is important as it shows the hope aspired to when a refugee seeks to retain her/his territory. However, this action coalesces with the age of the speaker, as he is not a young man, but elderly. The second stanza points to the dream that 'your children shall inherit the earth'. Inheritance can be understood in the process of going back to the native home. This return is not yet accessible, because, instead of 'stars' referring to hope, the old man discovers that 'the land [is] filled with dried leaves/the heavenly smell of "white phosphorous"'. The 'white phosphorous' suggests that the speaker's homeland is in a state of war and ethnic cleansing, which threatens the native with extinction. The old man may represent the end of one generation, but the younger generation may not actually live longer because their 'land [is] filled with dried leaves'. This poem also represents the state of indecisiveness in which the refugees are positioned. The fact that one needs to go back to her/his home is an inspiring, yet unfulfilled project because of the many obstacles – mainly war and ethnic conflicts – that thwart the refugee from making the journey back.

Conclusion

To conclude: dislocation, nostalgia, and liminality – the three main concepts of this paper and of refugee poetry – could stand as a platform for studying refugee poetry. The first level concerns the role of the 'unconscious' in which nostalgia represents a major part of a refugee's identity. The second level concerns the transition of the subject from stability to liminality. As has been discussed in this paper, liminality is understood in its symbolic phase. Both levels can be summoned to negotiate the ethnic identity of a refugee in literary studies. The third level is the issue of dislocation. Dislocation appears as an important criterion that strives for a recognition of the narratives of refugees and removes them from the margins. It is important to

³⁴ Hilton Mendelsohn, 'Another African Catastrophe', *Exiled Writers Ink: Voices in a Strange Land*. 1 Sept. 2009 <http://www.exiledwriters.co.uk/writers.shtml#Mendelsohn>

³⁵ Eric Charles, 'Promised Prophecy', *Exiled Writers Ink: Voices in a Strange Land*. 1 Sept. 2009, <http://www.exiledwriters.co.uk/writers.shtml#Charles>

note that dislocation is identified in relation to the state of homesickness, wherein nostalgia forces the refugee to live in a story that is not his/her own. The three levels of abstraction are introduced to carve out methods in a manner similar to the approach taken by post-colonial minoritarians. They also show how the refugee fails in the process of deterritorialisation the moment s/he seeks to retain the old territory rather than creating one of his/her own.

Nevertheless, there is a feasible space that enables the minoritarian (including refugees) to represent their identity. Whether fixed, imagined or otherwise, refugee narratives cross the frontiers from afar and negotiate the transculturation engendered by globalisation. Incommensurability implies recognition of refugee narratives and helps negotiate their identity in the host cultures. Through this, transculturation assumes a wider context that postulates an ethics of encounters in our world today.